

Barbour Lathrop, Utilitarian Traveler

IN WASHINGTON recently there was awarded a medal—the first of the kind—to a private American citizen, in recognition of services to the country that were as valuable as they were singular. They might have awarded the same man another medal for modesty, as a provision of the work he has performed for the government and the public is that no publicity be given his activities. He has steadfastly refused to sit for a photograph out of fear that he might get into the public print.

A third medal might be awarded the gentleman in question, this one for his being the most widely traveled of all living Americans, an honor which his record would probably sustain. He has forgotten how many times he has been around the world, though his friends say it exceeds twenty-five.

It was as a result of his travels that the medal he received was bestowed upon him, for he has ever endeavored to make his travels of value to his country and through them he has rendered public services of the most far-reaching kind.

He is Barbour Lathrop, of San Francisco, who received the first Meyer Memorial Medal "for distinguished service in the field of foreign plant introduction."

Behind the medal itself there is a story quite as romantic as that attached to its recipient.

Frank N. Meyer, whose name it bears, was a famous agricultural explorer for the United States Department of Agriculture. He walked nearly 10,000 miles through China, Manchuria, Korea, parts of Tibet and Russian Turkestan, looking for new plants that might be of worth to our farms. He found many, a large number of which have been successfully established in this country, and numerous others are in the way toward establishment. For example, the Department of Agriculture is just announcing two of Meyer's Chinese varieties of pears that a five-year test has shown to be blight resisting. Chiefly as stocks for native pears they are expected to be of immense value to our pear-growing industry, which is now handicapped by blight. He also found a blight resisting chestnut to supplant partially our native species which is being destroyed by a blight, which he also found came originally from China. He brought in scores of other things like persimmon trees that bear fruit as big as apples and in some cases are puckerless and seedless, jujubes that will make successful fruit growing possible in many fruitless regions of arid districts in the West, a Manchurian spinach that prospers in summertime, the white-barked Chinese pine, a dry-land elm and a hardy yellow rose.

Meyer was born a Hollander but was very fond of his adopted country and proud of its achievements along agricultural lines. About five years ago he lost his life in China, having disappeared from a Yangtze river boat. He was drowned after his health had broken down while he was cooped up in a remote interior community by the ebb and flow of the Chinese revolution.

In his will Meyer bequeathed a fund of \$1,000 to his associates in the United States Office of Foreign Plant and Seed Introduction, through which plant immigrants come, to be used as an "entertainment" fund, the interest to provide the expenses for an outing once or twice a year.

The attachés of the office decided recently to use the interest from the fund in providing medals to be named for Meyer and to be bestowed on persons who render distinguished work in the interesting field so honored by the donor.

That the first one should go to Mr. Lathrop was the unanimous opinion of all; for, though he has never been officially connected with the government, it is to him probably more than to anyone else that credit is due for the establishment of governmental plant exploring on the basis underlying it for the last quarter of a century.

In his travels over the earth, Mr. Lathrop had taken care to send back specimens of any plants he thought would be valuable, but being neither a botanist nor practical agriculturist he recognized his deficiencies in making selections. Thus he began to take experts with him, always at his own expense, to advise. One of the first he took out was David Fairchild, now di-



The Frank N. Meyer Memorial Medal

The first medal was bestowed on Barbour Lathrop, utilitarian and philanthropic world traveler, who, at his own expense and without any notoriety, has rendered through the United States Department of Agriculture and otherwise, public services worth millions of dollars to the American public.

The medal was designed by Theodore Spicer-Simson. One side is a facsimile of a bas-relief which Queen Hatshepsut, of Egypt, had executed about 1570 B. C., to celebrate the introduction of the incense tree from the Land of Punt to the valleys of the Nile. The Chinese inscription on the other side is from a poem by Chi K'ang, who wrote about 618 A. D. Freely translated, the sentence is, "In the glorious luxuriance of the hundred plants he takes delight." To the right of the inscription is a fruiting branch of the Chinese jujube, and on the left that of the white-barked pine, both of which Meyer helped introduce in this country.

rector of the Office of Foreign Plant and Seed Introduction. He and Mr. Fairchild concluded that the search for foreign plants should be carried on by the government in a specialized and big way and they suggested the plan to James Wilson, then Secretary of Agriculture, who put it, as now pursued, into effect.

Then to get operations started in the right way Mr. Lathrop took Mr. Fairchild, who was to direct the new governmental establishment, on a three-year exploration journey. They visited every continent, and about one-half the countries of the world. Though they, or rather Mr. Fairchild, represented the government, Mr. Lathrop bore the full expense of the expedition. They sent back hundreds of new plants and

got ideas at first hand that led later to the introduction of many more. The results of their trip marked the beginnings of our adoption of Egyptian cotton culture, now carried on extensively in the Southwest. The cotton is of the long staple variety and its advent as a domestic product has been of immense value to the automobile tire industry as well as in making agriculture highly profitable on thousands of acres of land that two decades ago were arid desert. The same is largely true of date palm growing, now reaching a substantial footing in Southern California and Arizona, and of the introduction of the dasheen, rival of the potato, now growing in marketable quantities in the South, and perhaps of the bamboo, that wizard plant of the Orient, now being established in the South. There were scores of others, like a seedless grape from Italy, the panarite grape currant from Greece, Rhodes grass from Africa, the Lebbeck tree from the Suez and eucalyptus trees from the Island of Timor, all of which are now being grown successfully in this country.

During the twenty years since that journey, Mr. Lathrop has continued his travels, often with other experts accompanying him, and has steadily rendered service in the field of plant introduction. Recently he purchased a large and privately owned bamboo grove located near Savannah, Georgia, and gave the Department of Agriculture a 99-year free lease on it, so that the Office of Plant and Seed Introduction may use it in making experiments.

He has rendered similar services in other directions, and of those even less is known, for, being an old-school newspaperman he, with assiduous care, avoids all publicity.

"He is one of the greatest interviewers that ever lived," said an acquaintance of his to the writer. "He knew more rulers and leaders of politics in foreign lands than Colonel House probably knows today and he enjoyed and enjoys the confidence of all he knows. He was a sort of unofficial diplomat between this and other countries, as he was ever inquiring about everything that could be of constructive value to us or to other peoples. Since the days of James G. Blaine he has been the confident and adviser of many of our secretaries of State."

The "past tense" is used, for the reason that Mr. Lathrop doesn't appear to travel now as actively as in former years.

Excepting that he is a Virginian, the brother of Mrs. Thomas Nelson Page and a newspaperman mainly of San Francisco and foreign correspondence experience, practically no personal details can be given regarding him. The reason is that his friends, knowing his inveterate distaste for notoriety, refuse to supply them.

Even when the Meyer medal was given him, not a line appeared in any newspaper regarding the incident, and it was with considerable reluctance that he consented for a report of the event being published in the *Journal of Heredity*, organ of the American Genetic Association, trustee of the Meyer fund, and through which all of the Meyer medals are to be given.

After reviewing Mr. Lathrop's work in the realm of foreign plant and seed introduction, Mr. Fairchild, who presented the medal, said:

"The valuable advice and moral support he gave when they were needed the most and the assistance which he has given to the establishment of so many valuable new industries in our country merit the recognition which his own modesty has made it heretofore impossible to give him."

"I suppose Mr. Lathrop has a plant immigrant farm where he can watch specimens of the things he has helped introduce develop," was remarked to one of his friends.

"Why, he hasn't even a back yard garden," the friend replied, smiling, "and I doubt if he ever had one. He even lives at a club. He has never had any interest in bringing in things just because they were unique. The industrial or economic worth, or the general esthetic value, to the country, or sections, or business is his invariable test. He is the exact opposite of the plant hunter who seeks such things as rare orchids or ferns for his own personal gratification."

When the Animal and Vegetable Kingdoms Meet

THE sight of a fat white caterpillar, some four or five inches long and half an inch around, might not attract unusual attention, but if this caterpillar had a small green plant growing out of his neck—well, anyone might look a second time to be sure that he was not suffering from the ailment commonly known as "seeing things."

Yet such a sight would not be unusual in parts of the Asian jungle, where nature is unusually extravagant. The caterpillar starts out at birth to be a very ordinary fellow, one of the puriri moth family, hatched in the bark of a puriri tree. Once the hatching process is finished, the new-born insect generally tunnels into the soft wood of the puriri tree for a couple feet, and makes himself a sizable home where, safe from his bird enemies, he will be able to live comfortably until it is time for him to appear as a beautiful silver moth.

But, as in most families, there are a few wanderers; some strange desire to see the world causes some of these caterpillars to climb down the tree trunk after weeks of hiding, and for a time they are lost to view in the insect life on the floor of the jungle.

Then something very strange happens, for while burrowing in the soft earth at the foot of the trees a fungus spore of a vegetable growth fastens its small pin-like roots in the folds of the caterpillar's body close to the head—and starts to grow.

This growth is fairly rapid. The roots push into the caterpillar's body, and at the same time a thin, green stem starts upward. At first the caterpillar pays no attention to the strange plant, but goes on his way about the forest floor. When the plant stems get to be three or four inches high, however, the caterpillar can carry it no farther. He gives up his search for food, his wanderings, and buries himself two or three inches deep in the soft earth. From that time on until his death he is the animal-root for a vegetable body. The plant grows quickly, reaching a height of eight or ten inches when full-grown, and resembling closely a miniature cat-tail, or bullrush, such as we find in our own marshes with no leaves, a single stem, and a full brown head, or seed-pod.

When it is ripe, this seed-pod breaks, and the seeds float away to find a resting place in the necks of other caterpillars. The bursting of the seed-pod marks the death of both the plant and its animal-root.